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12 CUTTING COSTLY SMALL BUSINESS INSURANCE

An insider's advice on where—and where *not*—
to cut corners.

Don Ruhter

15 THE FRANCHISE ROUTE TO YOUR OWN BUSINESS

The "ins" and "outs," the "dos" and "don'ts" of a
much maligned industry.

Jerry H. Opack

20 THE WEATHER MAN

He couldn't possibly predict the weather. It
was all a sham. Or was it?

Jack Ritchie

DEPARTMENTS

4 MESSAGE

6 LETTERS

8 YOU AND RETIREMENT

10 BACKYARD GARDENER

18 IT'S YOUR BUSINESS

23 SPORTSACTION

24 NEWS OF THE LODGES

28 ELKS NATIONAL SERVICE
COMMISSION

30 TRAVEL: MEXICO

35 "MARQUIS de LAFAYETTE"/
BICENTENNIAL SALUTE

37 VISITS OF WILLIS C. McDONALD

42 ELKS FAMILY SHOPPER

63 DID YOU KNOW?

63 EDITORIAL

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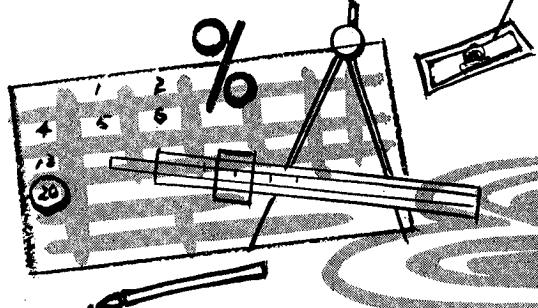
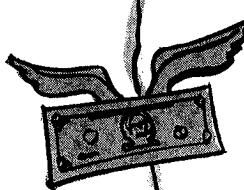
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454

the weather man

by Jack Ritchie



□ I made a notation. "You say the marriage ceremony is scheduled to take place at ten o'clock tomorrow morning?"

Juliette Carmichael nodded. "I know that's rather short notice, but I just heard about you yesterday. I'm getting married at St. Leo's and I'd like it to be a nice sun-shiny day. The reception will be in the afternoon."

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I really can't guarantee receptions. That is a field unto itself. My province is only the marriage ceremony."

She accepted the limitation. "Well, mainly I'm concerned about the wedding. I wouldn't want it to rain."

I consulted several of my charts and then ran a finger down a logarithm column.

"It's truly amazing how you're able to predict the weather," Miss Carmichael said.

I agreed. "It is a gift which I try to use for the benefit of mankind." I multiplied 22,826 by 4,426, pondered over my slide rule, and then did a

little long division. "I'm afraid that there's a slight inharmoniousness in the Fourth Quadrant of Spencer's Mobile Infraction."

"Oh, dear. You mean it's going to rain?"

I smiled reassuringly. "No. I positively guarantee that there will be no rain during the marriage ceremony itself, however...." I tapped the sheet of paper containing my calculations. "There is a chance of some cloudiness."

She showed considerable relief. "Well, what's a few clouds anyway? Just as long as it doesn't rain. That's a bad way to start off a marriage, you know."

"Who is the lucky man?" I asked routinely.

"Terrance Renfro," she said, and wrote out a check for one hundred dollars.

When she left, I went back to my crossword puzzle.

It is my profession, my trade, my bag, to predict the weather—particularly for weddings—and I do this with

an accuracy of over ninety-six percent.

How am I able to achieve this near miracle? Really, it is quite simple.

I always predict fair weather. Always. Or to be more precise, I predict that it will not actually rain.

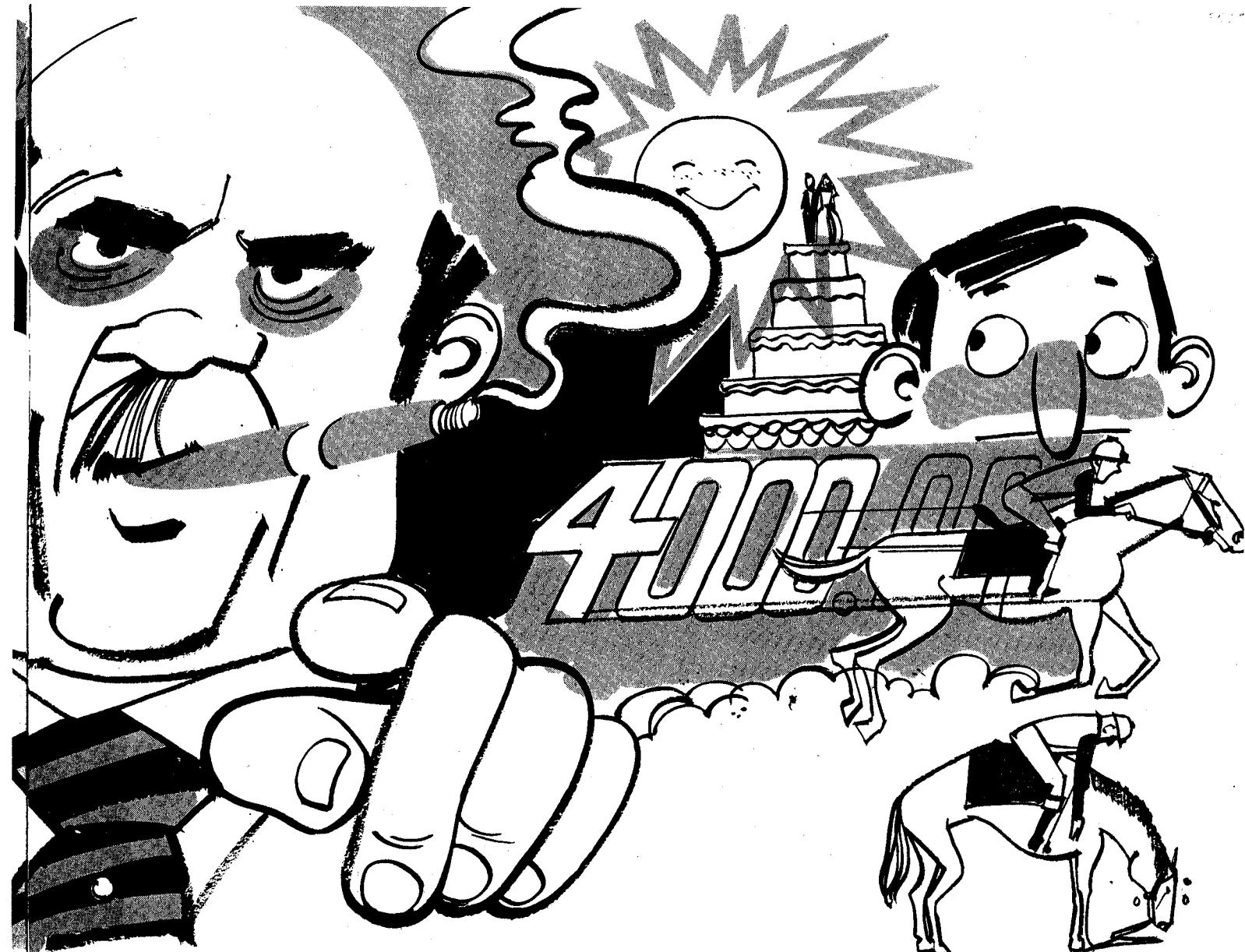
To begin with, according to weather statistics for this part of the midwest, there are—on an average—only six days in the month of June which one might describe as "rainy."

Therefore by predicting fair weather, my chances of being correct are immediately twenty-four out of thirty, or eighty percent.

But I go further.

I predict *only* that it will not rain "during the ceremony," which almost always takes place between the hours of eight and twelve in the morning.

And since it does not rain twenty-four hours a day, even on "rainy" days, a bit more mathematics will show that the chances that there will be rain during any particular four hour segment of the month come to less than four percent.



And if it does rain?

I cheerfully give my clients double their money back, which, of course, occurs less than once in twenty-five times.

I had just finished my crossword puzzle when I heard the outer door to my waiting room open and close.

I let seven or eight minutes pass—one must not appear too eager to shear the sheep—and then opened my office door.

I found a young bespectacled man who studied me earnestly.

"Are you the weather man?" he asked. "The one who predicts the weather or double their money back?"

I acknowledged that. "With ninety-six percent accuracy."

He seemed impressed. "Ninety-six percent? In my book that means there's more to it than just predicting. You must have the *gift* to make the kind of weather you want!"

I laughed deprecatingly. "People have said that about me before."

He nodded. "Nobody is right ninety-

six percent of the time without some kind of an inside track. Right? When you want sunshine, you *get* sunshine. And when you want rain, you *get* rain." He pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. "And I want rain tomorrow."

Frankly, no one had ever asked me for rain before. I was curious. "Why?"

"I'm sorry, but that's personal. I just want a nice steady soaking rain tomorrow."

It wasn't that I was unwilling to take his one hundred dollars, but the odds were overwhelming that I would just have to give him double his money back tomorrow.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I've already promised someone else sunshine. First come, first served, you know."

He fixed me with a steady eye. "I am not a person who haggles. I'll give you four thousand dollars if I get rain tomorrow."

Four thousand dollars?

That did change the picture a bit. I could take his money and leave

town tonight. Four thousand made the move worth it. Besides, I'd practically milked this territory dry anyway.

I rubbed my jaw thoughtfully. "Well, if rain is really *that* important to you, I just may be able to swing it."

He took out his check book and began writing. "You won't have any difficulty cashing this at the First National. I've already spoken to the people there."

When he handed me the check, I saw that his name was Terrance Renfro.

Terrance Renfro? And he wanted rain tomorrow?

I was mildly shocked. "You *want* rain on your wedding day?"

He flushed slightly. "It's sort of a tradition on my side of the family. It rained when my parents got married, and my grandparents, and my great-grandparents. I wouldn't want to break the chain. It's bad luck."

After he left, I went immediately to the bank and cashed his check. I returned to the office with the inten-

tion of gathering a few personal belongings before leaving town and found a tall, heavy-set man with hair graying at the temples waiting for me.

"Are you the weather man?" he asked.

I admitted as much and he studied me. "Do you know who I am?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," I said.

"The name is Carmichael. Mike Carmichael."

It came to me now where I'd seen his face before. In the newspapers. It was reported that—in a subterranean fashion—he controlled the north side of this city. Or was it the south? Actually I didn't suppose it really mattered, except to the people living there. I felt distinctly uneasy in his presence.

"What was Renfro doing here?" he demanded.

I could see no particular point or profit in denying Renfro's visit. "He wanted a weather prediction."

"And what did you give him?"

"I said it would rain tomorrow."

Further wheels meshed in my brain. Mike Carmichael? Juliette Carmichael? Was she his daughter? And Terrance Renfro his future son-in-law?

I yielded to the impulse to perspire. I had predicted fair weather for Carmichael's daughter and rainy weather for his son-in-law. The contradiction was clearly embarrassing and could

possibly lead to pain.

I laughed quickly. "I predicted a sunny morning for your daughter and rain in the afternoon for your son-in-law to be."

He regarded me skeptically. "You're telling me that you can pinpoint weather like that?"

I pointed to my slide rule, my charts, and the other various window dressing. "It is all quite complicated, but an exact science."

"How much did you charge Juliette for the sunshine?"

"One hundred dollars. My usual fee."

"And Renfro?"

I hesitated a fraction of a second. "One hundred dollars, of course."

He leaned over me slightly. "I got other information. Now tell me why Renfro would pay you four thousand dollars for rainy weather?"

My throat was quite dry. "He told me that he was getting married and it's a tradition in his family that it rains sometime on the wedding day. I promised him rain only for the afternoon."

Carmichael winced with disbelief. "He gave you four thousand dollars just for predicting rain?"

I dabbed at my forehead with a handkerchief. "I seem to have an unexplainable influence on the weather and some of my clients are so grateful

for my services that they insist upon paying me a bit more than the usual fee."

Carmichael rubbed his neck. "What Juliette sees in that dimwit, I'll never know. I got the feeling that he's up to something. I'd ask him myself, firm-like, but he'd run to Juliette and she'd yell at me." He moved to the hall door. "But I'm keeping my eye on him. And you."

When he was gone, I hurriedly stuffed a briefcase with the things I intended to take with me and then glanced about the reception room to make certain that I had left nothing of importance behind.

I frowned at the racing form lying on the magazine table. Who had left it there?

I paged through the booklet and found that it covered tomorrow's races at Sportland Park. A green ink mark had been made beside one horse in each race.

Renfro had signed his check with green ink, hadn't he?

I studied the form again. Evidently Renfro played the favorite in each race, except for the fourth, where he picked a horse named Watercress.

Watercress had been out six times and never in the money. The form gave odds of 50 to 1.

(Continued on page 38)

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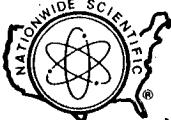
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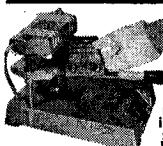
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The Weather Man (Continued from page 22)

Why would Renfro pick favorites in all of the races except the fourth? Did he know something? I thought it over. Horses. Watercress. Long shot. Rain. A wet track.

Could Watercress run in the mud? *Really* run in the mud? A man could make a killing if he had inside information like that.

And Renfro was willing to part with four thousand dollars to make it rain?

The killing would have to be made off-track, of course. Any large amount of money bet on Watercress at Sportland Park would immediately bring down the odds before post time.

And off-track betting on the north side—or was it the south?—was controlled by Mike Carmichael.

But obviously Renfro wasn't telling his prospective father-in-law about the coup. That meant that Renfro was going to marry Carmichael's daughter in the morning and double-cross Carmichael in the afternoon.

I sighed at the iniquity of man and also at my inability to provide rain on command.

When I reached my apartment, I packed a suitcase and opened the door to the hall.

Carmichael stood outside. His eyes went to the suitcase. "Going somewhere?"

I cleared my throat. "I just received word that my favorite Uncle Mortimer in Portland passed away and I was about to attend his funeral."

Carmichael shook his head. "Let Uncle Mortimer get put away without you. Stay in your apartment until I say different."

I went back to my apartment and closed the door.

Obviously Carmichael had decided to keep an eye on me until he found out what Renfro was up to.

After an hour, I opened the door again. Carmichael was gone, but one of his representatives had taken his place. The short burly man stared me back into my apartment.

I tried again at intervals, including two and four o'clock in the morning. The faces changed, but the principle of guarding me remained the same.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear. Juliette would have a perfect day for her wedding.

I phoned the corner restaurant and had breakfast sent up, but I found I couldn't eat it.

At eleven, as I was mixing my third bourbon and soda, I glanced out of the window. The sky had begun to darken.

At a quarter to twelve, it began to rain. A steady soaking rain. One that

could make a race track really sloppy.

I glanced at my watch and took a long drink. What time was the fourth race at Sportland Park? Probably about three?

I sat down at the phone and put in a call to Joey Evans in Peoria.

"Joey," I said, "I'd like to put five hundred on Watercress in the fourth at Sportland Park."

There was a pause while he evidently wrote that down. "Haven't heard from you in a while."

"Been traveling."

"Watercress? Looks like a dog to me. Five hundred? You never put down more than a couple of tens before."

"I know, Joey. But last night I dreamed about watercress sandwiches and then this morning when I picked up the form, there it was. Watercress in the fourth. You got to play something like that, Joey."

He could understand that. "All right. Five hundred on Watercress."

Next I dialed Ed Leonard in Madison, Weiss in Milwaukee, and Kramer in Rockford.

Five hundred here, four hundred there. I spread it around, making certain, of course, that none of it was laid down in Carmichael territory, whichever it was. When I was through I had four thousand bucks on the line.

I made myself another drink. Now what about Carmichael?

When Watercress came in and his bookies got hit big by Renfro, he would ask questions until he got answers.

But Renfro probably had plans to get out of town fast, safe, rich, and possibly with Carmichael's daughter.

That left me here, the patsy.

Carmichael was bound to decide that somehow Renfro and I were in on the deal together. It wasn't too hard to imagine what Carmichael would do to me.

I took courage in a few more drinks and then opened the door to the hall.

The short burly man was back.

"I've got to see Carmichael right away," I said.

He shook his head. "Carmichael's at his daughter's wedding reception. Whatever you got to say will wait."

"This is a matter of life, death, and especially money," I said. "Lots of money and Carmichael will be doing the paying if I don't get to him in time."

It took my guard a full minute of jaw rubbing and head scratching to make up his mind. "Okay," he said finally. "Let's go."

He took me to the Westerland Hotel, where Juliette Carmichael's wedding reception was being held in a packed hall on the third floor.

He caught Carmichael's eye across the room and pointed to me. Carmichael frowned, then nodded, and made his way through the mob.

When he and I were alone in a small room off the main hall, he scowled. "Well?"

"I now know why your son-in-law wanted rain so damn bad," I said. I showed Carmichael the racing form and explained the entire set-up.

Carmichael's face darkened. He opened the door and spoke to the burly man just outside. "Get that little bastard Renfro and bring him here."

When Renfro was escorted into the room, he did not look at all happy, especially when he saw me.

Carmichael did the talking and when he was through, Renfro's mouth hung open.

"But, Dad," he said, "It's really nothing like that at all. Yesterday morning when Juliette told me she was going to this weatherman, it gave me a *brilliant* idea. The weatherman *guaranteed* double your money back if you didn't get the weather he predicted. I checked with the weather bureau and they said that there wasn't a ghost of a chance of rain this weekend. So I went to the weatherman and ordered *rain* for today. Don't you see, Dad? I knew positively it wasn't going to rain and so he would have to give me *double* my money back. Eight thousand dollars."

I blinked. Was Renfro really that simple? That naive?

Carmichael waved the racing form in front of Renfro's nose. "Do you deny this is your green ink?"

Renfro frowned at the form. "I thought I forgot that in the weatherman's office. I always play the favorites, except I had this dream about watercress sandwiches. But even then I only bet two dollars, like I always do."

Carmichael grabbed the phone on the corner table. After a few calls he put down the receiver. He seemed slightly incredulous. "There hasn't been any heavy betting on Watercress with anybody in my organization. Also the fourth race at Sportland was just run and Watercress came in sixth."

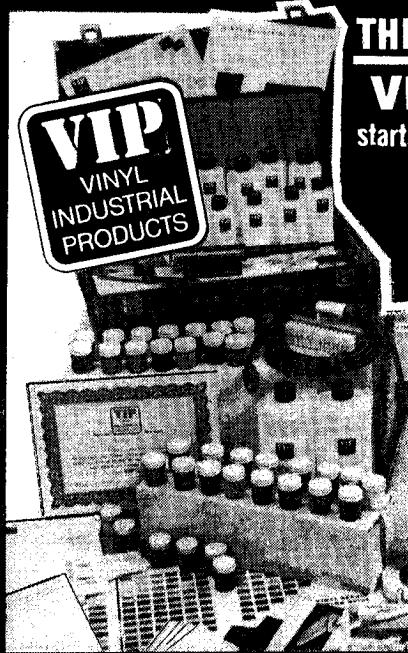
Sixth? I felt distinctly ill.

Four thousand dollars down the drain on a damn horse that couldn't run in the mud, or anywhere else, for that matter.

Carmichael glared at his son-in-law. "Didn't it come to your keen mind that the weatherman would probably skip out of town with your four thousand?"

Renfro frowned. "Do you think I should have checked him out with the Better Business Bureau first?"

"One other thing," Carmichael said. "Yes, Dad?"



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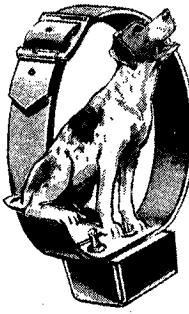
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Carmichael pointed to the window. "It's raining."

Renfro nodded sadly. "It looks like you can't even trust the weather bureau these days."

Carmichael indicated the door. "Go join the lucky bride."

When Carmichael and I were alone again, he studied me. "Everybody's missed the real point but me. You said it would be sunny in the morning and it was. You said it would rain in the afternoon, and it did."

He offered me a cigar. "Even the weather bureau with all them fancy instruments couldn't call that. So maybe you got something going for you. Right? Maybe you really got the power to call the weather any way you want it? Rain or shine?"

He lit the cigar for me. "Suppose I got myself a real good horse that runs terrific on a wet track and I keep quiet about it? And suppose you provide the rain on the day I need it? Something like that could be worth twenty grand to me."

Twenty thousand? To make it rain? And suppose it really *did* rain on the day Carmichael wanted. I could parley that twenty grand into....

I took a long drag on the cigar and smiled at Carmichael. Yes, there was still one born every minute. ■



1976 March of Dimes

Grand Secretary Homer Huhn Jr. points out a youngster with a similar handicap to six-year-old Tammy Patterson, the 1976 March of Dimes Poster Child. Tammy and her mother stopped in the offices of Elks National Headquarters in Chicago during a tour to kick off the national March of Dimes campaign. Many at the headquarters were amazed at Tammy's ability to get around despite her multiple birth defects. She lives with her parents on a 12-acre farm near Mount Pleasant, Tennessee. The March of Dimes funds research, medical services, and professional and public health education programs aimed at the prevention of birth defects.



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